



# Moderator's Report

## Principal Moderator's Feedback

### Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE  
In English Language (9EN0)  
Non-examined assessment

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## **General overview**

Despite the challenges of the last two years, it was extremely rewarding to see how well-prepared students were for the A-level English Language NEA/coursework and both centres and students are to be congratulated on the hard work that has gone into preparing for this component. The majority of centres now appear to understand the specification extremely well. Moderators once again reported on a wide variety of interesting topics and approaches for the original writing tasks and in many cases, coherently written, evaluative and well-structured commentaries.

It was excellent to see how many centres had once again made use of the online training events and associated exemplar material provided on the Pearson website. Moderators commented on the way many teachers had referenced exemplar material within their script annotations and their summative comments, which is excellent practice and one that I recommend for future series. Every year we add additional material to the website and new material will be available in the 2022 Autumn term.

In the few cases where marking was inaccurate or the specification requirements had been misunderstood, the individual moderator report for each centre, which is published on results day, will provide clear advice on how to approach the NEA and apply the mark scheme accurately. All centres would be advised to make use of them before future students embark on the NEA work and certainly before teachers start marking and moderating work in 2023.

## **Original writing**

Moderators reported a wide range of topics and approaches for the original writing, and it was clear that, once again, students were enjoying the chance to research an area of individual interest, either inspired by reading they had completed elsewhere on their GCSE/A-level courses or from their own interest –the range of writing styles and genres was impressive.

A high proportion of the scripts were well edited, and the majority of students produced work that was shaped for specific audiences with a strong individual voice. The popular choices this year were narrative writing and in particular fantasy or dystopian fiction. The stronger pieces showed real insight into the genre, not only in terms of understanding the end product, but also showing insight into the process of constructing meaning, with concepts such as 'world building', critical concepts, theories of narrative structure and character types, with Todorov and Propp often in evidence. Strong students were able to assimilate these concepts whilst weaker students often struggled to make meaningful reference to such concepts in commentaries. This often resulted in a shallow and formulaic approach, and in turn they were often unable to produce controlled and effective writing where they were attempting to deploy techniques they had learned about rather than fully assimilated through extensive reading and enthusiasm for the genre. The same could be said of middle to low ability students - whatever the genre - if they appeared to be relying on a 'taught' task rather than choosing tasks that suited their skills or abilities. Other popular genres included opinion articles and both moderators noted that there were more blogs written this year, and examples of these will be made available on the website in the Autumn 2022 term.

Sometimes students appeared to be using style models that had been introduced to them - regardless of suitability - to inform their chosen writing task/style. For example, some students had referenced Bill Bryson as their style model and attempted light-hearted and witty memoirs/travel pieces. Whilst some of them had produced excellent pieces that had clearly benefited from exploring what makes his writing appealing, others struggled in their commentary to make features of his writing 'fit' what they had written.

There were some examples of style models that simply did not model good writing. For example, whilst personal lifestyle blogs from 'influencers' may well be good examples of their type in terms of commercial success or popularity with their audience, this does not necessarily make them models of good practice for A-level students. Where students are choosing style models, especially from online sources, it is best for them to ensure that there is a reputable publisher/organisation behind the source that can be trusted to have editorial quality control processes in place, or at least where there is good reason to assume that language use is of a high standard.

One moderator commented on a particularly good example of a task that drew on a 'personal' style model that had an appropriate quality. This was the script for an online revision presentation for Geography students, which drew on the 'Mr Bruff' YouTube videos for English students. Although these are from a 'personal' website and YouTube channel, the fact that Mr Bruff has also published books that are used in many schools, and his videos are recommended by reputable educational websites, makes him a suitable style model. The student used Mr Bruff's approach but also drew on their own skills and experience to write a presentation script for a different subject.

Problematic tasks sometimes occurred where the students writing adopted some aspects of the form of a style model but had content that would not be appropriate. For example, an online 'blog' that drew on a style model from a particular website but presented information that was largely invented and indeed seemed more like science fiction. It would not have been at all appropriate for the chosen website, but no alternative outlet was suggested by the student.

Perhaps the most frequent example of weaker task selection involved students adopting alternative personas far removed from their own experience when writing non-fiction. Writing about a gap year before you've had a gap year can sound inauthentic and means that the student misses out on the opportunity to show high-level journalistic and editing skills such as interviewing a gap year student and re-presenting their words, and undertaking research into specialist student travel companies, for example.

Another area that was highlighted by the moderators was when a student produced sports reporting on events that happened years ago, or film reviews of movies released decades ago. If a student has a particular interest that these articles reflect, then they could be guided towards either more recent events/films or perhaps a retrospective article looking at the impact of a particular sporting event on the athlete's subsequent career, or a piece on the influence of a particular cinematic landmark on later directors, or a re-evaluation of its portrayal of issues in the light of changing social norms.

Following my 2019 report, it was pleasing to see that, examples of students attempting to reproduce graphological features are now quite rare, and tasks of the 'pretending to interview famous people' type seem to have been eliminated as well.

One task that was considered poorly chosen was the transcription of a political speech. Whilst MPs may have a speech written for them by someone else for some types of parliamentary business, they would not include introductions by the Speaker of the House, heckling, interventions and questions from other MPs. If a student does not know the difference between a 'script' and a 'transcript', for example, then it is difficult to claim they have 'clear understanding of genre', let alone 'effective' or 'assured control of genre' even if their transcript looks and sounds exactly like a transcript would.

## Commentaries

Most centres seemed to have guided their students well in what is required from a commentary. Despite my advice in previous PM reports, there were still some examples of students not meeting specification requirements, such as writing two completely separate commentaries, but these were few in number. The best commentaries had the specification requirements firmly in mind that students should:

- discuss the findings of their initial research into their chosen genre
- make connections between the techniques used in the style models and those they have adopted in their own writing
- evaluate language choices they made, through the drafting process, to achieve effects appropriate to the chosen function and target audience- any concerns/praiseworthy areas.

The first bullet point was sometimes neglected, however, and there were some cases where evidence of focussed and rigorous research into a named genre was only implicit, and sometimes barely detectable, in either the commentary or the choice of tasks. However, the majority were able to keep their commentaries succinct and within the recommended word count.

## Assessment

One of the most striking features of this series was the quality and accuracy of centre assessment. There was inevitably both under- and over-rewarding of work and this was most prevalent in the commentaries, where observational, explanatory and descriptive accounts of the content were sometimes given very high marks. The criteria for Level 5 require an evaluative approach, with sophisticated structure, discussion of nuances and an appropriate register and style. For original writing to achieve Level 5, it must be accurate and assured, with an individual voice suited to audience and/or function. However, there is no reason why outstanding work, which does not need to be perfect, cannot be awarded full marks. On the whole, centres did seem willing to use the full mark range, although responses below Level 2 were few and far between.

This was the first year where coursework was submitted via the Learner Work Transfer (LWT) portal and although there were some teething problems, most centres were able to upload their material successfully.

There did not appear to be many problems with administration, with most sheets completed appropriately. There were a couple of instances where the apparently agreed mark on the work itself did not correspond with the mark on the NAS. In some cases where there were missing signatures, it may have been a scanning issue where the student declaration was on the reverse of the NEA authentication sheet (NAS). Very few centres had failed to submit an NAS.

A small number of centres had failed to include the highest and/or lowest marked folders when these were not in the designated sample and centres need to remember that these must be included in future series.

Annotations and presentation of work was generally good with fewer examples of teachers just listing AOs in the margin and using a summative comment that simply repeated the level descriptors. Best practice was where there were relatively few, but more detailed marginal annotations that did not simply lift a descriptor from the mark scheme but pointed out specific techniques that were felt to be 'sophisticated'. Increasingly centres are taking on board advice to refer to exemplar materials. However, sometimes this felt 'tokenistic' rather than insightful. There are now sets of folders from a range of years covering the full mark range, so referencing

a specific exemplar material is very helpful for the moderator. Also, references to standardising folders are most helpful if there is a specific aspect of judgement that is difficult or when judgement is difficult because work is at the borderline between levels, or different aspects of the work differ in quality. For example:

'Control and selection of literary techniques is even more sophisticated than 2019 Folder 1, and the two pieces have a stronger sense of addressing the sub-genre audience, but less careful editing has allowed more technical lapses through; however, these do not interfere with meaning, so on balance a slightly higher mark is deserved.'

It appeared that fewer centres were out of tolerance than previously. Some centres gave a separate mark to the two pieces of original writing and applied a mathematical 'split the difference' approach to the final mark, which at times disadvantaged the students. A best fit approach would be fairer in these situations.

Very few centres failed to evidence internal moderation, and these mainly occurred in small centres with only one teacher, but even then, most seemed to have another assessor look over the work. The apparent effectiveness of this was variable, however. There were a couple of centres where most marks seemed to have been 'nudged up' by a second marker, not always with clear, or sometimes any, justification. As with reference to standardising folders, internal standardisation should be targeted where it's needed. Where a centre had 'agreed' with an initial, this possibly suggested a tokenistic approach. It was most helpful to see comments that gave a reasoned basis for suggesting adjusting a mark. It is also important that the final mark is absolutely clear.

There was a concern before this series that centres may be a little uncertain about marking the NEA component, after a gap of two years, however the moderators felt that the marks awarded were fairly consistent and comparable to previous series. Overall, the standard and range of work seen by all moderators was fairly secure and of a quality expected at A level.

## **Conclusion**

The majority of comments from moderators referred to how enjoyable it was to read work from students who had entered into the spirit of the qualification and produced entertaining, engaging and often very moving work, supported by thoughtful evaluation of the shaping of these texts.

It is to be hoped that centres will be able to develop this even further in future, maintaining a balance between creativity and analysis and ensuring that students express themselves with an eye always on genre, function and audience.